



AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

# Stress in America

Mind/Body Health: For a Healthy Mind and Body, Talk to a Psychologist

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

December 4, 2008

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## **Financial Concerns Top List of Holiday Stressors for Women, Families with Children** *American Psychological Association Offers Strategies to Manage Stress and Promote Health during Holidays*

**Washington, DC, December 4, 2008**— As reports about the extent of the recession in the United States are released this week, a new poll from the American Psychological Association (APA) finds that more than eight out of 10 anticipate a stressful holiday season and that the economic crisis is impacting women and families most.

While Americans continue to report financial issues related to money (82 percent), the economy (82 percent) and work (69 percent) as sources of stress, households with children are more likely to report money (88 percent v. 80 percent without children) and work (74 percent v. 67 percent without) as significant stressors this holiday season.

Women are significantly more likely than men to worry about having enough money to purchase gifts (46 v. 35 percent). Households with children are more likely to report anticipating stress this holiday season than those without, with more than half anticipating stress caused by not having the money to purchase gifts (51 v. 37 percent without children), and one-third expecting stress due to pressure to buy gifts (32 v. 25 percent) or too many things to do (34 v. 27 percent). These stressors may explain why many families with children (30 percent v. 21 percent without) report that they expect to experience more stress this holiday season than last year.

“Many people feel overwhelmed during the holiday season, and given the current economic crisis, the pressures can be extraordinary,” says psychologist Katherine Nordal, PhD, APA’s executive director for professional practice. “These unrelenting financial stressors can become a real health issue for women who continue to report stress at dangerously high levels and for families who are in an important position of teaching stress-management strategies to children.”

The combination of many potentially overwhelming stressors that are added to day-to-day responsibilities during the holidays can be a concern, but regardless, nearly half of adults (49 percent) in the U.S. say that the stress of the holidays will not interfere with their ability to enjoy them.

“It is important to put things in perspective and realize that materialism is not the focus of your holiday. The holidays are about more than presents. This is a time to celebrate family and friends and to take time to relax and enjoy each other,” says Dr. Nordal.

APA suggests the following strategies to help Americans prevent holiday stress and enjoy a worry-free season:

1. **Take time for yourself** – There may be pressure to be everything to everyone. Remember that you’re only one person and can accomplish only certain things. Sometimes self-care is the best thing you can do—others will benefit when you’re stress-free. Go for a long walk, get a massage or take time out to listen to your favorite music or read. All of us need some time to recharge our batteries—by slowing down you will actually have more energy to accomplish your goals.
2. **Volunteer** – Many charitable organizations are also suffering due to the economic downturn. Find a local charity, such as a soup kitchen or a shelter, where you and your family can volunteer. Helping those who are living in true

poverty may help you put your own economic struggles in perspective and help to teach your children the joy in giving and doing for others.

3. **Have realistic expectations** – No Christmas, Chanukah, Kwanzaa, or other holiday celebration is perfect; view inevitable missteps as opportunities to demonstrate flexibility and resilience. A lopsided tree or a burned brisket won't ruin your holiday; rather, it can create a family memory. If your children's wish list is outside your budget, talk to them about the family's finances this year and remind them that the holidays aren't about expensive gifts.
4. **Remember what's important** – The barrage of holiday advertising can make you forget what the holiday season is really about. When your holiday expense list is running longer than your monthly budget, scale back and remind yourself that what makes a great celebration is family, not store-bought presents, elaborate decorations or gourmet food. It's the relationships in our lives that are most important.
5. **Seek support** – Talk about your anxiety with your friends and family. Getting things out in the open can help you navigate your feelings and work toward a solution for your stress. If you continue to feel overwhelmed, consider seeing a professional such as a psychologist to help you develop coping strategies and better manage your stress.

The holiday stress survey is part of APA's Mind/Body Health public education campaign. For information on the survey or for more strategies to identify unhealthy stress, visit [www.apahelpcenter.org](http://www.apahelpcenter.org).

### **Methodology**

This 2008 holiday stress research was conducted online within the United States by Harris Interactive on behalf of the American Psychological Association between November 20-24, 2008 among 2,821 U.S. adults, 18 and older. No estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated; a full methodology is available.

*The American Psychological Association (APA), in Washington, DC, is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States and is the world's largest association of psychologists. APA's membership includes more than 148,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants and students. Through its divisions in 54 subfields of psychology and affiliations with 60 state, territorial and Canadian provincial associations, APA works to advance psychology as a science, as a profession and as a means of promoting human welfare.*

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